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SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 1846.



NOVEMBER brings the first indications of the returning London season,—not of fashion, but of science, art, and literature,—and all the principal “societies” of the metropolis open again their closed up doors, for the periodical meeting, and the prosecution of their particular purpose:—

“The public haunt,
Full of each theme, and warm with mist
discourse,
Hums indistinct.”—

Last year was a period of much commotion in many associations, nor has it yet subsided. In the direction of the Royal Society are evidences of disturbance; in the Society of Antiquaries further efforts will be made to increase its efficiency; and in four or five of the younger societies, confidence and regularity are yet wanting. It will be our duty to chronicle their proceedings, so far as they may be instructive and useful, and, while we would wholly discourage groundless cavilling and personal bickerings, to assist every legitimate endeavour to remove abuses and increase their usefulness.

The Institute of Architects held their first meeting on Monday last, and the president, Lord de Grey, took the chair. At the close of last session, we expressed our dissent from certain proceedings of the council, and expressed a hope that some alterations would be made and a bolder and less confined policy adopted. This we still hope for. At the same time we would remind the members how much depends on them, and urge them individually, to give such assistance to the council as may be in their power; either by forwarding the results of their observation and reading, in the shape of papers, or proposing such questions for consideration, relating to the art and science of architecture, or professional practice, as may seem to need solution.

The meeting on Monday night was numerously attended, and Lord de Grey showed the same interest in the progress of the society and good feeling towards the members, as have always animated him. Mr. George Allen, and Mr. Mayhew were elected fellows, and Mr. Charles Barry, Jun., an associate.

The Dean of Westminster offered for exhibition, a large model of Westminster Abbey, executed in cork by a young man who is a clerk in a merchant's counting-house.

Mr. Donaldson, in connection with the model, wished to draw the attention of the dean to an addition greatly required at the Abbey. He meant the spire, at the intersection of the nave and transept. While this was wanting, the Abbey would always appear unimportant amongst the fine buildings by which it was being surrounded. It had been said that the piers were not strong enough to carry a spire; but surely this was not insurmountable: they might be taken down and reconstructed; and he felt sure, for such a purpose, a subscription might easily be raised to supply the required funds. By the addition of the spire, the Abbey would be distinguished from the parliamentary buildings, where there are lofty towers but no spire. He hoped, with the aid of the dean, the Abbey might soon receive its crowning glory.

The dean said this was contemplated in the time of Christopher Wren; but the seizure of the columns was so great, that it appeared to be dangerous to attempt it. The columns were of Parbeck marble, and he doubted if more could be obtained; moreover, if the piers were enlarged sufficiently to carry the spire, the proportions of the interior might be injured.

We should be glad if the objections urged by the very reverend doctor, were the only difficulties in the way, as we should then soon see the spire commenced, and have the proper outline of the building restored.

There are many other things required in the Abbey of easier accomplishment than this, and we do hope that Dr. Buckland, who is, very properly, ever ready with suggestions for the restoration and amendment of other buildings, will now look at home, and lend his aid to improve the abbey church of Westminster. Let him get rid of some of the monstrous specimens of bad stone-masonry which now disfigure and injure it, giving parts of it the appearance of a statuary's show shop rather than that of a Christian temple. The ancient monuments should be carefully looked to and maintained; and Henry Seventh's Chapel, both inside and outside, requires immediate attention. As regards the construction of the spire, we ought to be grateful that Wren, great artist as he was in other respects, was not commissioned to effect it; and almost equally so in the case of James Wyatt, who in later times also reported upon it. There would be much less chance of the removal of an incongruous disfigurement, such as would certainly have been placed there, than there is now of a spire being commenced. We would gladly contribute to remedy the mischief Wren did at the west end.

Among the donations received were drawings by Mr. Haviland, architect, of Philadelphia, of the Halls of Justice at New York, in the Egyptian style, and of the Pennsylvania State Penitentiary, “the first prison erected on the Haviland plan.” What there is in it to entitle its author to claim the plan as his own, was not apparent. The general arrangement is on the principle of radiation from a central building.

Mr. George Mair then read a description of an ancient structure existing at Al Hather, in Mesopotamia, illustrated by drawings, and of the curious sculptured marbles recently discovered by Mr. Layard at Nimroud, the site of Nineveh. Mr. Layard's researches being regarded with considerable interest by many persons, and the results promising to be of considerable value, we give the whole of Mr. Layard's communication on the latter subject, and will, next week, in like manner, give his more architectural description of the Temple of Al Hather, as arranged by Mr. Mair. The letter is from Nimroud, near Mosul, dated 12th May, 1846, and is as follows:—

“I am now exploring Assyrian ruins, in the neighbourhood of Mosul, on the Tigris. I have been thus engaged since last November, and the success I have met with has exceeded my most sanguine expectations. I am at present digging out a palace which has probably been quietly reposing under ground from the time of Sennacherib.

You may have heard of the French discoveries at Khorsabad, in this neighbourhood, which have created so much interest in Europe. Mine is something after the same kind, only on a much larger scale.

To what city this palace belonged is doubtful: the large collection of mounds which now mark its site are called Nimroud; and the tradition of the present inhabitants of the country all

point to that hero, and to Ashur, as the founders of the city. Modern travellers have believed the ruins to be that of Resen, one of the primitive cities mentioned in Genesis, and have identified Resen with *Larissa*, an Assyrian town mentioned by Xenophon. Indeed, *Nimroud* has as good a claim to be identified with *Ninereh*, as any other ruins in Assyria—*perhaps a better*; and until I can make out the inscriptions I have discovered to my satisfaction, I shall consider them to be those of that celebrated capital of Assyria.

The mode of construction amongst the early inhabitants of Assyria appears to have been very simple. Slabs of marble, from 10 to 14 feet in height, from 1 to 2½ feet in thickness, and varying very considerably in width, were placed against an intervening wall of sun-dried bricks, generally about 6 feet in thickness. These slabs were covered with sculptures, sometimes historical, sometimes religious;—the former being battles, sieges, sea-fights, triumphs, representations of the monarch and his attendants, &c.; the latter, divinities of various shapes. Enormous symbolical figures frequently occur, such as bulls or lions with human heads, and with wings; these usually form the portals, and are carved out of one block of marble. I have a pair of such bulls, above 14 feet in length, and a pair of lions, 11½ feet. It would be difficult to convey an idea of the imposing effect they make. They form an entrance into a temple, into which I am now going to dig, and which I have already ascertained is covered with sculptures. Nothing so beautiful as these lions were discovered by the French; indeed, the sculptures at Nimroud far exceed those at Khorsabad, in the richness of detail and variety of subject.

The inhabitants of Assyria at that time probably exceeded all the nations of the earth in power, and riches, and luxury. Their knowledge of the arts is surprising, and their style I believe to be purely their own, and not Egyptian, as some would have it. There is as much difference between their sculptures and those of Egypt, as there exists between those of Assyria and Greece, and they held relative positions in point of knowledge of the arts. The lions lately discovered, for instance, are admirably drawn, the muscles, bones, veins, quite true to nature, and portrayed with great spirit. There is also a great “*mouvement*” (as the French will term it), in the attitude of the animal and “*sa pose est parfaite*.” The human head too is really grand!

It is curious that the artist has given the animal five legs. He has done this in order that when you look at him in front or at the side, he may appear to have the proper number, for although the figure is in relief, yet at the end of the slab it is in full. Between the legs are long inscriptions in the cuneiform character.

Over the slabs appear to have been placed layers of painted and glazed bricks; the ornaments are exceedingly elegant, and the colours very brilliant; they are still in perfect preservation. It is difficult to conjecture how the roof was constructed, but it appears most probable that *only timber was used*, and that it was flat.

I have found many ornaments in ivory, copper, and a kind of porcelain which may have decorated the ceilings. The rooms were paved either with slabs of marble, with layers of bitumen, or with bricks. In all cases, however, there was a thick substratum of bitumen, and beneath the whole, a thick layer of fine sand.

Every slab of marble in the building, and there are some thousands, has an inscription, generally on both sides; this is the case even with the pavements.

There was only one story or rather only a ground-floor to the edifice, which was built on the summit of a lofty artificial mound. The inscriptions are in the cuneiform, or arrow-headed character, such as was used in the earliest ages in Assyria and Babylonia. Of the precise date of the building, I can at present say no more, than that I am pretty certain that it must have referred to the time of the dynasty of the Assyrian kings, mentioned in chronicles and kings, and that it is not impossible that it may belong to an earlier period.

I am now working on a very small scale, and am anxiously waiting for orders from England, which may enable me to examine

* Mention of these discoveries has already been made several times in *THE BUILDER*.